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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 002111

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BK](#) [YI](#) [UNMIK](#)

SUBJECT: BOSNIA: PM DODIK CLAIMS HE'LL MODERATE RHETORIC
ON SERB "SECESSION" FROM STATE

REF: A. STATE 149123

[B.](#) STATE 136492

[C.](#) SARAJEVO 2095

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DOUGLAS L. MCELHANEY. REASONS 1.4 (B), (D).

[¶1.](#) (C) SUMMARY: During a September 11 meeting with Republika Srpska (RS) Prime Minister Milorad Dodik, Ambassador delivered ref A letter from Under Secretary Burns to PM Dodik, and underscored USG concerns over Dodik's comments on Kosovo during his recent visit to Belgrade. Dodik claimed his meetings in Belgrade focused exclusively on economic issues; he did not discuss Kosovo with Serbian leaders; and his Kosovo statements were made only in response to direct questions from the Serbian press. Ambassador reiterated to Dodik the importance of refraining from inflammatory pre-election rhetoric, especially regarding an independence referendum in the RS. Dodik said he was anxious to put the referendum talk behind him, but was not sure of the best course of action. The Ambassador urged Dodik to focus his campaign on a positive vision for the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, rather than using secession threats to counter his political rivals. On police reform, Ambassador encouraged Dodik to re-engage with the Europeans, noting the EU will probably show flexibility in negotiations. Dodik said he would not be ready to resume political discussions on police reform until after the elections. END SUMMARY.

Kosovo not Discussed in Belgrade

[¶2.](#) (C) Ambassador met Republika Srpska (RS) Prime Minister Milorad Dodik in Sarajevo on September 11 to deliver a letter from Undersecretary Burns (ref A) and raise USG concern over Dodik's recent statements about Kosovo and an RS independence referendum. Ambassador also drew from ref B points outlining to Dodik USG expectations on the outcome of Kosovo status negotiations. Ambassador pointed to USG disappointment over Dodik's public comment that Kosovo should remain a part of Serbia after his recent meetings with Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica and President Boris Tadic in Belgrade (ref C). The Ambassador said that Dodik's comments had raised concern in Washington and were also receiving significant attention in the region. Dodik replied that his Kosovo comments were made only after questions from Serb journalists. He claimed that the subject of Kosovo did not come up in any of his meetings with Serbian officials, which were focused exclusively on increasing economic cooperation between the RS and Serbia. Dodik asserted that he is not at all concerned about Kosovo, and that he and Serbian officials assume that Kosovo will become independent in some form.

Dodik: Referendum Talk is Election Rhetoric

¶3. (C) Citing numerous examples of Dodik's increasingly provocative statements on an RS referendum over recent months, Ambassador warned Dodik that these statements add to the negative, nationalist tone of the election campaign and the USG views such destabilizing rhetoric with serious concern. Dodik claimed not to recall many of the statements Ambassador cited and claimed the press focused only on his referendum comments while ignoring statements on his continued support for the April package of constitutional amendments. Dodik said his referendum comments were made only in response to calls from Bosniak politicians, especially Party for BiH President Haris Silajdzic, for the abolition of the RS. Ambassador told Dodik that regardless of his motives, his calls for a referendum were being taken seriously by other ethnic groups and by the international community as a serious attempt by Dodik to place in question the independent, sovereign status of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

¶4. (C) Dodik claimed he had no intention of calling for a referendum, and was anxious to remove the issue from public debate. However, he was unsure how to achieve that without seeming to back down in the face of Silajdzic's call to abolish the RS. The Ambassador urged Dodik to reframe the debate in terms of his vision for a future, more coherent, and agreed, government structure for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ambassador said Dodik should focus on how he sees better relations between the entities and the national-level government. Dodik pledged to consider how to rein in discussion of a referendum. He suggested he could make clear there was no need for a referendum in the face of international community reaffirmation of the Dayton Constitution and the legality of the RS.

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Police Reform: No Re-engagement Until After Elections

¶5. (C) Ambassador told Dodik that the U.S. and UK are trying to find a way out of the current impasse over police reform. He urged Dodik not to jeopardize the signing of a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) between the EU and Bosnia, adding that the Europeans have expressed their willingness to be flexible. Dodik said the RS would work "intensively" on police reform after the elections, claiming the RS is ready to cede legislative authority on law enforcement to the state. Ambassador said the U.S. was still very much engaged in the process, and that the core issue was the need for state level operational control over the police. He said he knows the EU has not made its views clear on the subject, but if that is the crux of the RS, concerns, then the RS needs to be prepared to discuss it. The Ambassador reminded Dodik of his agreement to the regionalization of policing, including regions that cross the Interentity Boundary Line (IEBL), reached last year between Ambassador, RS President Cavic and former HighRep Ashdown. He added that the Europeans are prepared to be flexible, but Dodik must stop threatening to boycott the Police Reform Directorate in order for the USG to help get the talks back on track.

Comment

¶6. (C) Dodik's assertions that Kosovo, an RS referendum and police reform are merely tactical campaign issues that will fade away after the elections are not new. However, we remain unconvinced of his sincerity, and his ability to walk back from such highly charged rhetoric after October. Dodik's public statements have reached a level of audacity that threatens to undermine the functionality of any new government. Although Dodik attempts to downplay Belgrade's influence in RS politics we are troubled by signs that Serbia, and increasingly Russia, are attempting to advance their own interests by encouraging Dodik's linkage of Kosovo and an RS referendum. We note in the press September 13 that

Dodik at least temporarily is saying that the referendum issue is less timely now that "international authorities" have asserted that the Republika Srpska's existence is assumed. End comment.

MCELHANEY